

**SENATOR BOB BENNETT
RADIO NEWS CONFERENCE
(May 27, 2005)**

Participants:

**Tom Jordan, Metro News
Kevin Kitchen, KSVC in Richfield
Chad Phares, Davis County Clipper
Jennie Christensen, KVNU in Logan**

Topics Discussed:

Senate Agenda
School Trust Land Exchange
Drafting legislation: who writes the bills?
Stem cell
Prescription drug costs: Drug reimportation
Energy bill: Nuclear power, nuclear waste
Illegal immigration and border security
Bolton nomination
Iraq/Afghanistan budget
Tax reform in Utah: Flat tax
Federal highway bill
Iran and the WTO

Metro – What do you think the priority is of the Congress, with everything kind of gummed up on the filibuster issue. What do you want to see accomplished first?

RFB – The one thing we have to do is pass the appropriation bills. We have to fund the government. That is the one thing that keeps us moving forward in every Congress all the way through. We are on schedule to do that at a faster rate than has been done in many years. Now that's not very exciting, but that's an indication that this Congress is moving forward quite efficiently. We've passed a large number of bills that have been stalled in the past by filibusters. So, the headlines may be all about the judges, but the legislative agenda is going forward.

Social Security, I think, should still be on the agenda. I don't think we will see a bill on that score until later in the summer, and probably no action until early fall. I certainly have maintained an interest in the issue and have continued to work on it. We've got, as far as Utah is concerned, the Washington County land use planning process. We're working on some land exchanges to try to help the school land trust people. We're very grateful that the BRAC process, with respect to Hill Air Force Base, seems to be behind us, but that's been one of the things we've been working on a great deal.

The economy is doing well. People may not have noticed that the GDP growth in the first quarter was reported at 3.1 percent, which is in historic terms, very good. That's just been revised upward to 3.5 percent. And in the process, the federal receipts have gone up 20 percent over what they were a year ago, and that is without an increase in tax rates. That is an indication that the tax cuts are working, the recovery is strong, and the federal government is getting a lot more tax dollars coming in because incomes are up and profits are up.

We've got to worry about Iraq; we've got to continue to move forward on the Middle East peace process with the Palestinians. We've got a number of domestic issues, but overall, in spite of the judges issue, Congress is moving forward and the country is economically doing much better.

K SVC – What are the specifics on what lands we’re talking about? What are the possibilities of this thing actually making it?

RFB – I think the possibility of it making it is pretty good because we’ve started this process. The first major school trust land exchange occurred in 1998, another occurred in 2000, and the act I’ve introduced is a step in the direction of proposing transfer to federal ownership. Kokopelli and Slickrock biking trails down in southeastern Utah, and lands within wilderness study areas, and view sheds for Arches National Park. That will provide more consistent management by the park service with respect to that. In exchange for that we are going after land that is suitable for development that will help the school trust land receive more money for the school trust. So, we’ve got environmentally sensitive land along the Colorado corridor and then some development lands, primarily oil and gas opportunities, that would be made available to the school trust.

Clipper – Some readers have heard that senators and lawmakers do not write the bills, but that lobbyists do. What could you say about this, and could you explain how the system works?

RFB – Bills are written by the Legislative Counsel. Our office will call them and say, “this is what we want to do,” and they’ll write the bill and tell us if there’s a problem. All of the bills that are crafted are done by Legislative Counsel. I’m not a lawyer; I couldn’t sit down and write the bill. Even those senators who are lawyers end up putting their suggestions in the hands of the Legislative Counsel. Now, do lobbyists play a role in helping draft the ideas for the bills? Yes they do, and yes they should.

Let me make it clear that a lobbyist does not influence me to change my mind on a basic principle. But, if I’m writing a bill that will seriously affect the retailing industry – Walmart or Sears – I want to know what the effect of that will be before I have it put in the language. I may have an idea, and have gotten a letter from someone in Utah, but I want to call someone in the retail industry and say, “How will this really work?” They will send in a representative to talk to me or someone on my staff to tell us how they’ll benefit, how they’ll be hurt, if they’ll have better access to suppliers, and once I have that information I can make a judgment as to whether or not I want to do the bill in the originally conceived of way. That is the primary and proper role of a lobbyist: to see that the organization that he or she represents has input on how the legislation would effect that organization. So whether you’re talking AARP, which is probably the most powerful lobby group in Washington and is constantly talking to us about how Social Security would affect their members, or the labor unions, another powerful lobby, constantly telling us how certain legislation will affect their members. Lobbyists perform that function. The actual drafting of the bills is done by the Legislative Counsel.

KVNU – The Senate will be voting on the legislation that will expand the support of the embryonic stem cell research; I’d like to know how you’ll be voting on that and if you think the Senate will have enough votes to override a presidential veto?

RFB – I have supported federal funding for stem cell research with the embryo lines that are already in place. These embryo lines come from tissue that is not viable. It cannot turn into a real, live child. There are those who disagree, but I say that if the embryo has no opportunity, no way to become a live child then it should be used for research. I have supported that and will continue to support that. The House passed a bill 431 to 1 that would move to authorize \$79 million to collect and store stem cells from umbilical cord blood. That obviously is the source of stem cells, but it's not one that could eventually turn into a child. Senator Hatch has introduced similar language for that, and I would support that. Now, the other bill passed 238 to 194 and would provide for stem cell research, but it would extend the existing lines. President Bush said he would veto it; I think that's halfway between the position I've taken, and the position of those who say 'let's get stem cells out of embryos that could become children.' I will look very carefully at that bill if it comes to the floor. Whether it comes to the floor or has enough votes to pass right now is a little iffy. Stay tuned on this one, and we'll see what decisions Senator Frist makes, and what the Senate schedule is several months from now.

Metro – **The House has passed a bill that has put pressure on the Senate right now concerning prescription drugs; trying to get the consortium of 25 major trading partners that we could buy drugs from. What do you think the chances of that making it through the Senate are?**

RFB – The question is safety. It is very easy to say, "Oh, I can get on the Internet that will sell me prescription drugs from Canada at 30 percent lower than they are in the US; isn't that a good deal?" That is a good deal if you know for sure that the drugs are coming from Canada, but the GAO has done studies where they've bought these drugs over the Internet and they turn out to be from Africa. Yes, they have a Canadian address and an American label on them, but they are not the drugs they pretend to be. There have been no deaths yet, but that potential really is there. The drugs that come in fraudulently this way do have some of the appropriate drug in them, but usually the dose is substantially lower than what is posted on the pill. That is the challenge of reimportation of drugs; are you getting drugs that were manufactured in the United States, or are you getting a fraudulent substitute. Until that problem gets solved, I don't see the bill moving in the Senate.

KSVC – **The Senate Energy Committee has passed bills and it looks like this would accelerate the national storage of nuclear waste. In the meantime it looks like Utah is taking a blow from the NRC when it comes to stopping that from crossing our borders. Will this bill pass through committee and become a reality, and what does it mean when it comes to nuclear waste in Utah?**

RFB – There are two separate issues: the bill does support use of nuclear energy to create electricity in the United States, and so do I. The question is, what do you do with the waste? It has been established that the waste can be stored on site where it is created; it can be stored for a minimum of 100 years. My position is, let's have nuclear power. The rest of the world is using nuclear power – in France 80 percent of their electricity is generated by nuclear power. It can make a significant contribution to our energy needs here in the United States, but let's not be shipping it back and forth to

various locations when it can be safely stored right where it was generated for 100 or 200 years. The technology to reprocess the waste will come along. We already know how to reprocess it, it's just very expensive and the more we can study the more the price will come down. I think the logical thing is to leave it where it is and encourage the building of new nuclear power plants, but focus on the technology to reprocess the waste. That's the smart thing to do with it, and I think more and more decision makers here in Washington are coming to that conclusion.

Now the NRC said, "We think the site will be safe." But they haven't addressed the transportation issues, they haven't addressed the impact on the Utah Test and Training Range, the Defense Department has yet to be heard from, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Interior Department, there are a number of hurdles that have to be cleared. While this is a disappointing decision on their part, one that I disagree with, it is by no means the last word.

KSVC – The bill requires the Department of Energy to have a permanent site. Would that be a correct reading?

RFB – The Department of Energy already has a permanent site; it hasn't been licensed yet, that's the Yucca Mountain site. So you can say you have to have a permanent site – it's been required by law that the Yucca Mountain site is to be used, but the problem is that the site at Yucca Mountain keeps running into difficulties. So, it is understood that there will be no storage at anything other than the Department of Energy's sites. If there's going to be some storage, it will be at the Department of Energy, and the Goshutes, of course, do not belong to the Department of Energy.

Clipper – A poll on our website asked our readers about illegal immigrants and more than 40 percent responded that Americas borders need to be more secure. It seems as if the President and Congress have not been taking a lot of action to tighten the patrol. What can you share with our readers to put their minds at ease?

RFB – The border enforcement budget has quintupled since 1983; this is the second highest growth rate in the federal government after the defense budget, which of course went up as a result of the war. But the immigration population in the US keeps going up, and the illegal immigration keeps going up. What this says is that physical force on the border is not the answer. The answer I think is the proposal put forward by President Bush who says that the vast majority of these people are coming into the United States to work in jobs that people in the United States don't want. If you talk to people at ski resorts and hotels, they will say that many of the seasonal jobs do not have benefits connected with them and many of these jobs are hard to fill. These people who come across the border take these jobs, and then they would be willing to go back home when they're not working to be with their families.

That's why President Bush has introduced the guest worker program so that these people can come over temporarily to hold one of these seasonal jobs, and then you can return home without being harassed at the border. Now the border patrol is swamped by people who are trying to do this, and they don't have the time to intercept the people

they really should be going after – the drug dealers, and terrorists – and the more we have this flood of folks who are coming over to work, the more cover we give to the criminals who hide in the masses and overwhelm the border patrol. We have raised the budget of the border patrol five times and it doesn't have a positive result. The president's plan allows us to sift through these folks who are coming here for legitimate reasons and can get a temporary work permit – this is not amnesty and does not lead toward citizenship – then we can focus on the people we really need to keep out. It would make border patrol much more effective.

KVNU – There's been a delay in the vote for UN Ambassador after Democrats said they wanted more information on John Bolton; how do you think that's going to turn out?

RFB – After the recess we will get the additional two votes we need to invoke cloture and John Bolton will take his seat. There's a lot of commotion about Bolton, and a lot of people are frustrated that they can't get information. I don't think the Democrats are dedicated to dig in their heels and filibuster indefinitely here. In the frustration of the moment they decided to hold out for more time and information to change a few minds, but in the end, it looks as if he's going to get the vote.

Metro – Speaking of budget issues, twice this year additional funding for Iraq and Afghanistan, this is running somewhere over 300 billion now, is there any light at the end of the tunnel in that direction. Do you see the increasing deficit as a significant issue at this point?

RFB – Receipts, federal tax receipts, ran 20 percent higher than they did the corresponding month last year. As the economy becomes stronger I think the deficit will be significantly lower than it was originally expected. There were some projections that had the deficit as high as \$500 billion, now it is expected to be in the neighborhood of \$350 billion. It is coming down, and measured as a percent of GDP, it's about three percent and headed toward two percent, which is an area where you can be comfortable. You need to look at the deficit as a percentage of the overall economy, rather than the deficit as absolute dollars, because if the economy is growing faster than the government expenditures are, then the deficit as a percentage of the economy comes down.

Now Iraq, are there any hopeful signs? Yes, I think there are. I was there about two months ago. We are handing off, successfully and increasingly, the security problem to the Iraqi security forces. This means the American Armed Forces are engaged less and less. As that process continues that will mean we will need less money and less troops in Iraq. The long-term benefit if we succeed in Iraq will be very much worth the amount of money and the lives that we've spent, because the potential in the Middle East for significant military and terrorist unrest is huge. Two things have changed the equation in the Middle East significantly in the last two months. First, there was the Iraqi election wherein people began to see that there is a possibility that this could work, and secondly the death of Yasir Arafat. After we were in Iraq we went to Palestine and Israel and saw a lot of optimism there about some eventual resolution of

that problem as well. So, yes, we're paying a high price. As the economy becomes stronger it is a price we can bare, and the long-term payoff looks like it is actually there.

KSVC – The state lawmakers in Utah are looking at tax reform and have proposed a flat tax. Would you send them your philosophy on tax reform?

RFB – I haven't seen the details but I agree with the governor and the Legislature that Utah's tax code needs to be updated; it's been 30 or 40 years since there was a major revision. I think it's time and I congratulate the Legislature. We had essentially a flat tax because the rate was set at such a low level of change, but maybe they recognized that they could simplify. Anytime you simplify the taxes you're doing something I approve of.

Clipper – What do you believe are the chances of a fair highway bill being signed by President Bush, and what do you see as benefits for Utah specifically?

RFB – I think the bill will be signed. It's in conference right now, which means that it's passed the House in one version and the Senate in another. They will get together to resolve the differences then it will go to the president. Utah's problem lies in growth, and the more transportation help we can get to prepare us for that growth and handle that growth, the better of us will be. In the bill Utah will get \$230 million for transit. As far as Davis County is concerned that is commuter rail from Salt Lake up to Ogden. And \$1.4 billion in highways over a five-year period. While we weren't able to get Legacy Highway absolutely approved in that, we continue to push for that because clearly that is something the entire Wasatch Front, not just Davis County, badly needs. We need the federal help to do that. There are those who say this is pork barrel funding; Utahns have paid the taxes in gas tax that will fund this money, and while Utah does get a little more than we pay, we have a lot more real estate to cover. So, if we're going to maintain the interstate highway system to serve all of the states in the nation, it's appropriate that Utah gets maybe a \$1.03 or \$1.04 back for each dollar that we send.

KVNU – The US has dropped its opposition to Iranian membership in the World Trade Organization, do you feel okay about that?

RFB – The Iranians are lying to us. We know it, and the Europeans know it. It's a whole dance that's going on here to create a situation where the Iranians are not able to produce a nuclear weapon. This is one gambit in the diplomatic situation that's going on. We should not delude ourselves to think that in exchange for this the Iranians will make nice and everything will be wonderful. This is one step, and I guess I'm okay with it, because the administration is on top of everything and they're okay with it. I realize that we've talked to the French foreign minister and others about it and we all realize that the Iranians are lying. They are several years away from having a nuclear weapon and we want to stop them from going in that direction. If this will stop them, or slow them, then I'm in favor of it.